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ABSTRACT

This study of the school board agenda-setting role among 30 Minnesota superintendents interprets their perceptions in relation to environmental contexts, group demands, issues control, and district enrollment size. A microperspective of David Easton's political systems model provided the guiding conceptual framework. Respondents were interviewed using the same interview guide over a 2-month period. Superintendents perceived their political influence as having three foci: the power of their role in agenda setting and the existence of coalitions. A vast majority viewed themselves as responsible "gatekeepers." Overwhelmingly, superintendents interpreted their agenda-setting role as more important than that of the board chair or total board. The grounded theory that emerged from the study consists of 10 major themes, among them that agenda setting: (1) legitimizes districts' and boards' authority, (2) fosters school governance in a political system, and (3) structures district ideology. The superintendent's role, which is ascriptive, behavioral, and powerful, results from expertise. Perceived relationships between role and influence vary by district size. Gatekeeping and informed influence characterize superintendents from medium-size districts; democratic perceptions and strategic influence typify those from large districts. Findings position issues closely to the superintendent and recognize contextual and group constraints. Recommended research includes comparative case studies and longitudinal research. This study suggests including agenda setting in the educational administration curriculum and standardizing board meeting terminology to facilitate communication. A six-page bibliography is appended. (CJH)

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Minnesota Superintendents' Perceptions of Their Role and Influence in School Board Agenda Setting

Adapted from
A Thesis
Originally Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of the University of Minnesota

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PRESENTATION OUTLINE

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B. Practical background to the study.

C. My Personal Background

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2. Specific

C. Key findings

1. List low level summary.

2. 10 Key Generalizations

3. Conceptual Framework

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I. Introduction

At this very moment, or, at the very least, within the past week, superintendents across the country are engaged in an activity that to this point has eluded scholarly attention. Agenda setting is a practice that has presupposed research and drawn its success and failure from past experience, common sense, and operating assumptions. These are hardly a sound basis considering its importance to the political governance structure of American education. However, the study of agenda setting has only recently been noticed by political scientists. Only in the past fifteen years has it been investigated at the macro level of national and state politics. Educational researchers have only tangentially addressed it. They, instead, have been focusing on the political nature of the superintendency position and its linkages to school district politics. The need, formerly dormant and unconscious, to combine the two research foci and systematically study a pervasive educational practice has finally been recognized.

A significant assumption in the design of this study was that superintendents are key actors in the school district political arena, and consequently, the best informants on school board agenda setting. This is, of course, known through political logic--whereas school districts are political organizations and their chief executive officer is the superintendent, superintendents are, therefore, key actors. However, the significant school governance national study of Zeigler, Jennings, and Peak provided quantitative evidence which validated this assumptions, i.e. in nearly 70% of the school districts surveyed

superintendents had primary or sole agenda setting responsibility. A practical purpose, therefore, of this current research was to define what was agenda setting responsibility.

What prompted this researcher to be intrinsically curious about and, subsequently, consumed with school board agenda setting? It was NOT because she initially had a vast knowledge of common practice presupposing research. It was because she was requested to politically analyze a school district event as a requirement for a graduate politics of education course. The event was a scenario not unlike what many of you have experienced. The district was cutting back secondary teachers because of declining enrollments. The public was perceiving it as cuts in program causing equity problems in a two high school district. The specific school board meeting that was examined was attended by 350 people. The normal public attendance of meetings in this district was approximately 20. One of the major conclusions drawn was that the final outcome, which, incidentally, was favorable to the board, was somehow controlled by the agenda. This was the beginning of a close scrutiny of school board agenda setting, which eventually resulted in a legitimate research study.

Legitimacy of research, whether for an audience of practioners, university final oral examination committee members, or scholars in the field depends substantially on the credibility of the researcher. Though the researcher is not a superintendent nor a university professor, her career path and training qualify her for both. She has degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, and the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities.

Within those programs, she has had moderate to extensive training in politics of education, speech communication, basic components of educational administration, and qualitative methodology. She has spent many hours gathering various types of qualitative data both interviewing and participant observation and in analysis. Through her work as a research assistant, she enhanced her skills by constructing questionnaires and interview schedules as well as conducting intensive interviews with political elites. Her work as an elementary teacher and principal has developed interpersonal communication skills which include developing rapport, asking questions, probing for information, and maintaining objectivity. Her intuitive sense of balancing and integrating educational theory into day-to-day operations as well as her overwhelming curiousity about agenda setting makes this study interesting and unique.

II. The Study

Problem/Question

Agenda setting is a component of the political governance structure of American education. The history of school governance is quite extensive. Seventeenth and eighteenth century American schools were private or church institutions. This was likely the primary motivation for its omission in the United States Constitution. Therefore, it became the responsibility of the states. However, the clarity by which states assumed this role was an evolutionary process. As the nineteenth century progressed "public" schools began appearing because of the development of small communities and their desire for autonomy of governmental services. Control of these institutions followed a model of the town meeting concept. As states began defining their political histories and assuming issues for action, education and the taxation for it emerged in state constitutions as well as legislation to alleviate equity demands. Despite rising expectations, the states generally maintained the concept of small locally elected units, school boards, to govern education.

As the country became more urban and industrialized, the administration of schools became more demanding. Part-time, lay school board members became inadequate. Thus, the role of the school superintendent was created. Again, applying evolutionary theory, the position became more complex and subject to movements of professionalizing the position. Therefore, the contemporary superintendent could be described as a chief executive officer functioning in an open system.

Unlike school goverance, agenda setting does not present a well-documented history. Barbara Nelson in a national agenda setting study noted:

> Interest in agenda setting per se is not much more than a decade old. It emerges from the great elitism-pluralism debates of the post-war period which focused attention on which people--and which preferences--were to be heard in a democracy and with what results.1

The primary contributors to this early interest were political and social scientists. Educational researchers have made few contributions to its history and understanding. Therefore the intent of this study was to examine the mix of the two foci--superintendents and agenda setting--to gain a clearer understanding of their impact on the politics of school district governance.

Specifically, the purpose of this study was to investigate the role and influence of school district superintendents in school board agenda setting. The perceptions of selected Minnesota superintendents are described and analyzed with respect to environmental contexts, group demands, and the activities that affect the controlling of issues that are considered on board agendas and the order in which these issues are considered. The study also compares the relationship between the agenda setting role and influence of superintendents and the enrollment size of their school districts.

The study sought to answer these basic research questions:

1Barbara J. Nelson, "Making An Issue of Child Abuse: Political Agenda Setting for Social Problems," (Manuscript, University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 2-1.

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1. How do superintendents describe their role in deciding whose demands and which issues become agenda items for board consideration? How much influence compared to other actors do superintendents attribute to themselves in making such decisions?

2. How do superintendents describe their role in deciding the order of consideration for school board agenda items? How much influence compared to other actors do superintendents attribute to themselves in making such decisions?

3. How do superintendents perceive policy issues in relation to group demands and environmental contexts? How do these perceptions affect their agenda setting activities?

4. What are the relationships between the agenda setting role and influence of superintendents and the enrollment size of their school district?

The study of superintendents' perceptions of public school agenda setting is significant in three ways. First, it contributes to the body of applied research knowledge that falls across the academic lines of political science and educational administration. The agenda setting phenomenon, though having been practiced over an infinite time span, has just been embryonically researched. Common practices and assumptions need to be grounded and validated by data. Second, the roles of both school boards and superintendents are in constant flux and refined definition. This study contributes to the clarification of those roles. Third, it is a major contribution to the developing educational administration curriculum for superintendent training. Fourth, thorough understanding of the political behaviors of superintendents has been a frequent goal of not only practicing superintendents but scholars as

well. This study is an attempt at understanding specific behavior as it relates to the functioning of a school district.

Methods/Procedures

A thorough review of the political science and educational administration literature revealed no substantive study of superintendents and school board agenda setting. What existed was political science macro-theoretical models and laboratory studies of agenda setting and educational administration research of potential superintendent political influence upon this process. The existence of such a vacuum prescribed a study requiring a probing methodology; one answering the fundamental question, what is the "quality" of experience of superintendents and school board agenda setting. Patton notes:

> Answers to such questions require detailed, in-depth, and holistic descriptions that represent people in their own terms and that get close enough to the situation being studied to understand firsthand the nuances of quality.2

Qualitative methods, specifically the field technique of structured intensive interviewing, was selected primarily for the purpose of gaining an inner perspective to a process that heretofore was unexamined. The intent was to gain knowledge as to the description, categories, patterns, and themes necessary to an initial construction of grounded theory of school board agenda setting. In contrast, now that this study has been completed quantitative studies, those using hypothesis testing with or without the manipulation of variables in the field or laboratory setting gleaning numbers which do or do not have

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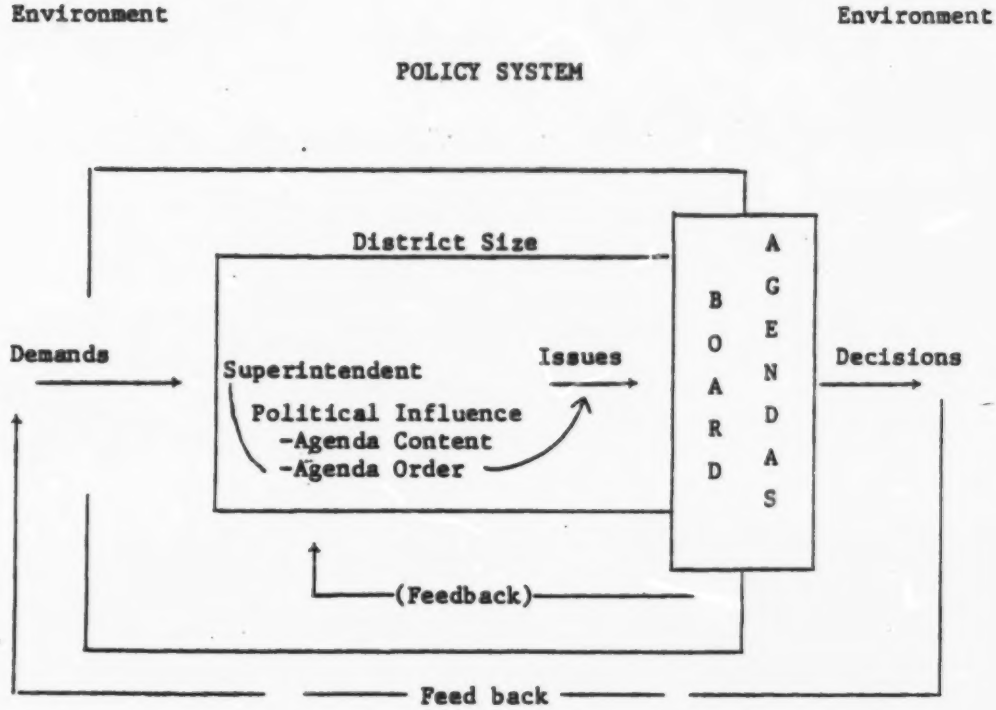
2Michael Quinn Patton, Qualitative Evaluation Methods (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1980), p. 74.

statistical significance can be conducted. There is now some basis to build a study.

There has to be, though, some guiding conceptual framework even in qualitative research. It is a guide to separate and categorize experiences to organize information, to provide a basis for importance or relevance, to simplify complex processes, to interpret patterns, to integrate ideas, to communicate, and to predict with some semblance of confidence. A derivative of Easton's political systems model was used for this study. However, the focus was narrower to attain the perspective of superintendents as they perceive school board agenda setting in the context of demands and political influence. The model appears as follows:



The rationale for the development of a more micro-perspective of Easton's political model borrows from the concepts built from the literature review. More specifically, the local school district policies are conceptualized as the object of political action because they authoritatively allocate values and scarce resources. The superintendent, because of the evolution of the position and placement in the hierarchy of the organization, is a key actor in the school district political arena. Although a key actor, he/she cannot directly make policy decisions, but can only influence them. To assure passage of a superintendent favored policy decision, he or she must secure or possess the support of a majority of school board members. Control over the school board agenda is potentially an important source of a superintendent's capacity to forge coalitions of influence among board members. Use of an agenda to form winning coalitions involves 1) control over what is to be considered for decision, and 2) the order of consideration. Controlling what is to be considered includes 1) which issues have access to agenda, 2) which "face" of the issue is emphasized, and 3) which options are proposed for issue deliberation. Controlling the order of consideration includes 1) the amount of time available, 2) revealing information on preferences, 3) commitment building, 4) provision of "garbage cans," and 5) opportunity to trade status for substance. The strategic use of board agendas by superintendents will be affected by district size and locational factors.

During July and August 1984, thirty sample superintendents from the sixteen county Metropolitan Area of the Twin Cities were interviewed regarding their role, influence, and general perceptions of school board

agenda setting. Based on the literature review, assumptions set forth in the study, and research decisions, superintendents were believed to be the best and most accessible informants to provide the depth and detail of school board agenda setting. The sample was drawn based on district size to determine if relationships of role and influence varied by that characteristic. Instrumentation consisted of an interview guide designed to capture the focus of the role and influence of superintendents in agenda setting in relation to the categories and properties outlined above in the conceptual framework. These were superintendent, political influence, demands, issues, content, order, and board agendas. Furthermore, internal and external validity and reliability concerns were addressed by employing theory triangulation in the question design to cross check informant responses and strategically placing them in the schedule, by piloting the instrument with four superintendents resulting in revisions, by using the same interview guide with all respondents in the course of two months, and by employing a skilled interviewer with the ability to probe, develop rapport, and insure confidentiality.

A five-phase analysis followed data gathering: initial review, categorization and coding, segregation per district size with identification of detail and description per emerging themes and patterns, condensation into low level generalizations, and higher level syntheses. During analysis variations of three kinds of triangulation occurred. Agenda documents secured from respondents were reviewed if an interview response was unclear satisfying a requirement of data triangulation. The researcher "recycled" (reviewed) her analysis over time and sought collegial review from experts in re-analysis satisfying,

in part, minimal requirements of investigator and methodological triangulation.

Findings

Any research findings are particularly shaped by their methodological design. Notwithstanding, this study provides critical foundation knowledge, i.e. detail and description, of school district agenda setting. Findings in a qualitative study often follow two levels. The first level is an initial synthesis of volumes of data. The second level of findings are the higher generalizations, often referred to as the hypotheses formulating the grounded theory. Following the categories of the conceptual framework the first level of summary data revealed the following.

Superintendents

All male, average age 49.1 years, educated well beyond a Master's degree, and had been in their current superintendency position an average of 10.6 years were the major demographic and educational characteristics of the study sample. Large district superintendents were the most highly credentialed. Small district respondents, however, averaged the most years of stability in their positions in contrast to the apparently mobile medium size district superintendents. A vast majority of all the respondents perceived their leadership style impacting on agenda setting. The six identified styles from most to least frequent were: open, democratic, participatory; provides alternatives, information, recommendations; control items; expediency; personal philosophy; set tone; and sense of board.

Board Agendas

Agenda document preparation always included superintendent involvement with 87% of the sample having the sole responsibility. Six defined procedures emerged with usage between and among districts varying considerably. Long Range procedures included going back to the previous years' agenda, setting major topics at the beginning or the year/month, securing input from the outside, process through the board and superintendent before preparation of the document. Defined Access procedures focused on routine items from past years, board input to administration, administration input for preparation of the agenda. Cyclical procedures began at the current meeting with board and chair input occurring there, the superintendent processing the items with administrative input, then preparing the document. Solitary procedures focalized the process directly on the superintendent, who gathered the information, roughed out the agenda, and finaly sent it out. Linear procedures were shaped by a time line of input from principals, board members, the public, and the superintendent. Some of the sample superintendents had procedures which were combinations of the basic five. See Table 1.

Political Influence

Superintendents' perceptions of political influence had three foci:

1. the power of their role in agenda setting.
2. whether they compete for the agenda setting role.
3. coalitions existing in and/or their building of coalitions among school board members.

Respondents perceived four role descriptors: key, major, shape, and catalyst. Approximately even distribution across the four perceived role descriptors occurred with some wide variances between district

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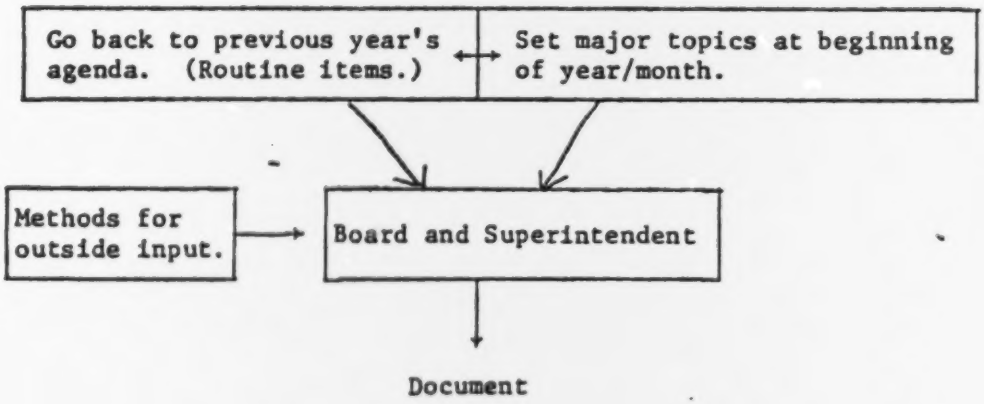
TABLE 1

Procedures for Agenda Document Preparation

Long Range


Go back to previous year's agenda. (Routine items.)
Set major topics at beginning of year/month.
Methods for outside input.
Board and Superintendent
Document

Defined Access

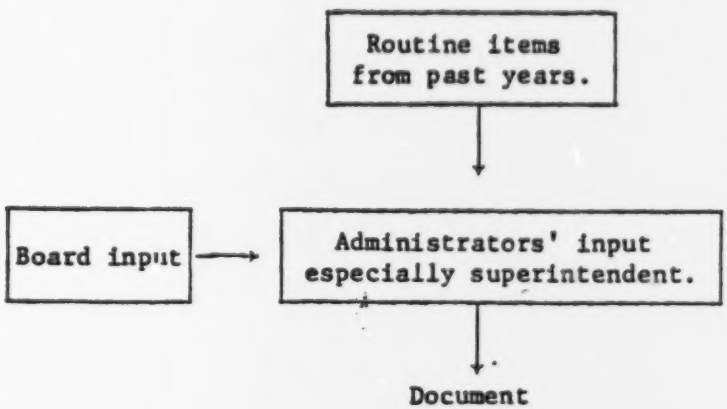
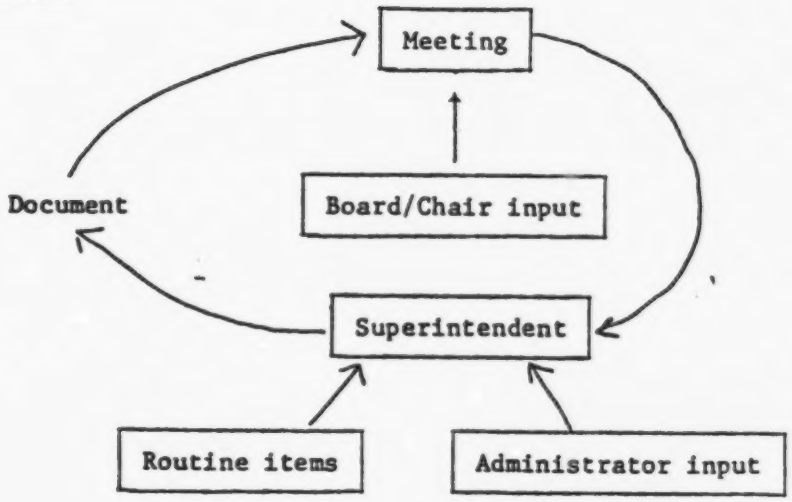
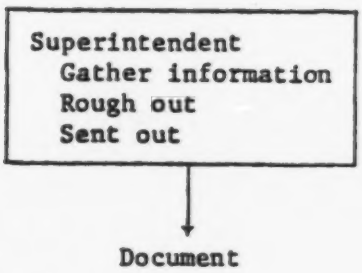


TABLE 1 (Continued)

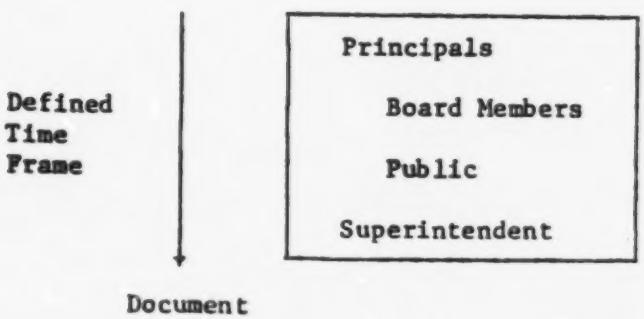
Cyclical



Solitary



Linear



sizes. These responses were validated when a vast majority of respondents viewed their position as well as themselves as gateKeepers. The informants cited the themes of a sense of community/democracy, job responsibility, and the context of process, people, and events, as the reasoning.

Overwhelmingly, the sample superintendents perceived their agenda setting role as more important than either the board chair or the total board, which validated an assumption of the study. They attributed the greater role to their position (access to issues, employee concept, and administrative task), apathy/delegated and historical/legal reasons.

Except for some slight abberations in the data, coalitions, based on partisanship, were weak. The most noticeable occurred in small districts where over half of the respondents cited partisanship in the district with farmers the most frequently cited group. Irrespective of the partisanship, however, across all size districts incumbents usually won in elections making for relatively stable boards. Interviewees found their boards to be in agreement with, sometimes a dissent, and infrequently opposing the superintendents. To support these perceptions, they cited board maturity, discussion lack of political orientation, consensus pressure, issue related, and commitment to education as the reasons.

Demands

Two demand contexts affect school board agenda setting--outside groups and inside groups. Overall, teachers, parents, and taxpayers were the most frequently articulated outside demand groups in contrast to perceived supportive groups of parents, teachers, and local politicians. Frequency of demand group contact altered the rankings

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slightly with teachers and parents retaining the same spots but PTA placing third at contact rate of some but less than half of the school board meetings a year. Outside demand groups appeared to have some to little affect on agenda setting. However, impact on agenda occurred in three ways: accommodated in meetings outside of an agenda item, handled administratively, and as an agenda item.

Predominantly inside groups were described as formal with some recognized as informal. Membership attainment was gained by inside channels, board or chair appointed, geographical/other, volunteers, parents, publicize, representatives from groups, and questionnaires. The vast majority of these groups had their tasks defined for them by the superintendent, board, or others. The groups were used strategically by the majority of the sample superintendents primarily for gaining support, community input, targeting district needs, and informing purposes. Over half the respondents admitted using the groups for coopting purposes which, when compared to previous data, was about a 60% consistency rate.

Issues

Issues in school district agenda setting had two components--categorization and definition. Respondents described five major semantic themes in respect to categorization. The first was the systematic structuring and designating of routine items. Second, sample superintendents used categorization as a strategic process in cases of control item, items difficulty, and dispersal of people. Two frequently cited category descriptors were public communication and/or participation and positive reflections. Traditional organization of issues around "old" and"new" business was the third theme. The fourth,

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application of outside influences on issue categorizations, represented responses incorporating such forces as state law and meeting evaluation. Personalization of agenda format, the final them, generalized the idiosyncratic, intuitive, strong sense of mission and commitment to educational program, and sense of board responses of the sample superintendents.

Issue definition was characterized by two communication structures--open and closed. The majority of sample districts were found to be open; however, small districts split in half. Receipt of agenda materials prior to meeting date, a process impacting on issue definition, averaged 4.3 days with the mode and median indicators showing small districts allowing 5 days. Inconsistent agenda terms were used by respondents regardless of implied definition.

Content

Perceptions gained on content of issues focused on access, emphasis (face), and the use of options in conjunction with issues.

Over three-quarters of the sample superintendents sensed and subsequently identified certain issues that should be left off the school board agenda, specifically,, sensitive personnel, administrative, land sales/litigation, negotiations, and sensitive student problems. Nonaccess was achieved through the strategies of use of administrative decision, private discussions, policy, correspondence and school attorney. The respondents who felt no issues should be left off noted they felt they could not keep items off that the Board should be aware of or required their action and it was deceptive or lacking in trust to manipulate issues.

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Over four-fifths of the sample superintendents had been surprised by a board's reaction to the face of an issue. However, the experience negligibly affected subsequent agenda setting activities. The most common changes noted were providing the board with more information and simply not putting the item again on the agenda.

Agendas were used to explain, generate, limit options, or a combination of the three. Usage of the various methods was approximately the same as well as the reasons for using them across the district sizes. Cited were superintendents' position mandated it, best decision for the community/prevent board error, depends on issue, board role, and logistics.

Order

Data gathered on control over order of agenda issues focused on the amount of time available, revealing information on preferences, commitment building, provision of "garbage cans," and opportunity to trade status for substance.

A sound majority of the sample had strategies and reasons for placing items when and where they did, especially items placed early. Specifically, courtesy to visitors, reduce board stress, cyclic/routine, and logical sequence were the expressed reasons for early placement of items. Courtesy to visitors, logical sequence, heavier items, then routine, routine items then heavier, sandwich long and short items, and private items late in the meeting were cited reasons for placement of items at other points in the agenda. Primarily, an attempt to reduce board stress or fatigue summarized the eight reasons given to place an item at the end of an agenda. The most effective strategies of time management were delay items, limit discussion of an issue, adjust

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written materials, and short meeting expectation. In the judgement of the sample superintendents, efficiency of conducting business and the social psychological understanding of school board meetings were the two most important reasons for employing strategies.

Nearly all sample respondents informed their boards of their preferences of issue outcome. Most frequently preferences were in writing placed in agenda packets. However, variations of method and manner were employed by several of the sample superintendents. Large district superintendents were the most open to their boards regarding their preferences.

Use of trial balloons for commitment building was varied. Just over half of all respondents employed the strategy, but between district sizes use was amazingly different. Medium size district interviewees were the least apt to practice the strategy. When employed by the sample, it was most frequently for testing levy referendum sentiment. In contrast, a substantial majority of the sample informants favorably defined issues to gain board commitment. The popular methods was various forms of written communication.

Eighty percent of the sample superintendents, consistent over district sizes, had provisions for "garbage cans," i.e., consolidated agenda contexts. Issues likely to be consolidated were personnel, policy, educational items, business, communication, routine, administrative committee reports, and information. Reasons that emerged from informants descriptions included no reason at all, evolution, tradition, legal, personal preference and efficiency.

Trading status for substance was explored with three foci: anticipation of board members' needs and desires, subsequent examples

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thereof with affect on agenda setting, and the use of discussion items for posturing purposes only. Over half of the informants anticipated needs and desires with examples falling into popular educational interest categories with the exception of agricultural concerns specific to small districts. Superintendents increasing their investigation of and finding and/or supplying more information on a special interest was the most frequent accommodation measure. Using items for discussion purposes occurred in 70% of the overall sample with the large districts reflecting the most use. Reasons for doing so most frequently were for superintendent feedback and getting information out to publics.

The Grounded Theory

The theory that emerged from the conceptualization of the low level generalizations consisted of ten major themes which were the basis for and resulted in an adapted conceptual framework. The ten themes weave into four literature bases: the political domain, school governance in a political system, the superintendency, and agenda setting.

Themes

1. Agenda setting is a component of the power transformation process legitimizing the authority role of school districts, board members, and the superintendent.

2. Agenda setting fosters school governance in a political system.

3. The agenda setting process reveals a school district's locus of power.

4. Agenda setting is the framework mechanism used for structuring a district's ideology.

5. School district agenda setting acknowledges religion as an outside demand group.

6. Agenda setting neither facilitates nor inhibits school district autonomy.

7. The superintendent's role in agenda setting is tacitly ascriptive, behavioral, and political.

8. The superintendent's influence in agenda setting results from his/her "expertise."

9. The perceived relationships between superintendent's agenda setting role and influence vary per district enrollment size.

a. Superintendents from medium size districts (1,000-3,999 students) are more mobile, have a more proactive, singular, and gatekeeping role in agenda setting and assert influence based on information per issue.

b. Superintendents from small size districts (0-999 students) are more stable, least educated, have a more controlling and delegated role in agenda setting and assert influence by virtue of inertia of the position.

c. Superintendents from large districts (over 4,000 students) are the most educated, have a more pluralistic and democratic role in agenda setting and assert influence by strategic use of the agenda setting process.

10. School district agenda setting is constrained by singular preparation, cultural values, institutional restraints, social structural inertia, and situational conditions manifesting itself in an idiosyncratic formal document.

Conceptual Framework

A policy system conceptual framework, described earlier, guided this study. The findings of this study suggest three modifications/additions to increase the effectiveness of the paradigm as a predictor of school district agenda setting.

First the category of issues needs to be realigned in relationship to the superintendent. This study suggests that, although issues enter the policy system from the environment and have a strength of their own, superintendents by virtue of their position have a proactive relationship with them. They cannot always prevent issues from appearing on the agenda, but their access to information, people, and

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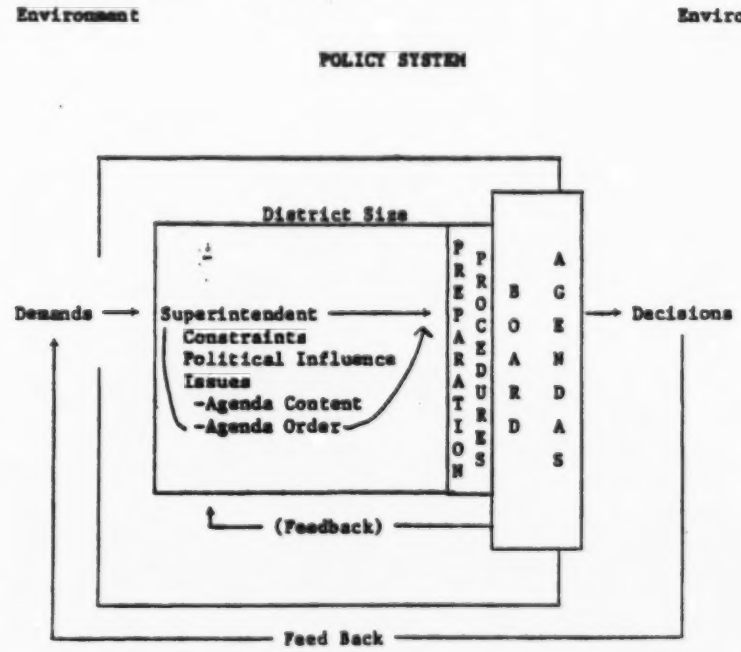
processes makes them a critical component of issue defintion and decision.

Second, a new category emerged from the study in response to the superintendents' perceptions of the environmental contexts and group demands from which the process emerged. "Constraints" were evident as superintendents attempted to define issues and present them to their boards. Because they were qualitatively significant, this category needs to be added to the policy system in order to more accurately understand the agenda setting process.

Third, a profound, yet easily discounted, phenomenon materialized in the data. Agenda preparation procedures clearly impact the agenda setting process. Activities and customs that heretofore have been overlooked because of their assumed commonness were found to cluster in six defined ways. The necessity of adding this component to the paradigm is evident. The common procedures affect the entire process.

Given now what is known about school district agenda setting, the conceptual framework model appears as follows:



III.Future Research and Implications

The research implications are enormous given the multitude of unanswered questions generated by this study. The genesis of grounded agenda setting theory has just begun. Some suggested research topics are the following.

1. Comparative case studies between and among small governmental units are needed to discover and/or modify agenda setting paradigms.

Many small governmental units have organizational structures, hierarchies, and governing boards similar to school districts. The universality of the model set forth in this study needs to be determined.

2. The tentative hypotheses postulated in this research require testing in empirical studies with valid and reliable instruments.

The findings of this study grew out of qualitative research. Specifically, self-report data with its inherent weaknesses were used. The natural research sequence prescribes quantitative tests of what is believed to be true. The comparing and contrasting of results gives the theory more predictability.

3. Replication of this study in different geographic locations is needed to increase the generalizability of the findings.

A recognized weakness of this study was its generalizability to populations outside of the sixteen county Twin Cities metropolitan area. Given a replication of this study elsewhere as well as a different researcher increases validation of the findings. Perhaps, the most important findings to be tested in this manner are selected

characteristics, i.e. how does the interplay of district size and superintendent education and mobility affect agenda setting in other geographic locations.

4. Comparative case studies of school districts in both macro and micro theoretical perspectives are needed to identify elements of the policy system that have been missed due to previous population selections.

Community citizens, school board members, district employees, and students are all organizational actors in the policy system outlined in this study. They have been the phantom population with perceptions that have been overlooked thusfar. Their knowledge needs to be tapped to give a more comprehensive and naturalistic description of school district agenda seting.

5. Longitudinal research is necessary to clarify the evolutionary nature of school district agenda setting.

Informants in this study detailed various aspects of their agenda setting process with comments about how it was in the past or why a certain format idea came about. Longitudinal research is the best methodology to define the evolutionary process and identify those findings necessary for curriculum development.

This study has a singular impact on the applied science of educational administration. There is a need and now a knowledge base for curriculum development on school district agenda setting.

The importance of the superintendent to the business and activities of a school district cannot be underestimated. Though educational administration courses have clearly trained prospective school administrators on management theory, educational power and politics, conflict management, interpersonal communication, leadership styles,

financial planning, and decision making, more entry-level and continuing education university coursework should focus specifically on the complexities of the superintendent leadership role. A course needs to be developed with content and objectives concentrating on the skills and knowledge necessary to conduct school district meetings--school board and otherwise. Given this training, a practicing superintendent can make better choices about procedures and activities in agenda setting. Further he/she is better able to predict and understand events related to issues and meetings.

Necessary to the success of coursework on school district meetings is the development and standardization of meeting terminology. The sample superintendents of this study used a variety of terms often connoting the same idea. Though "old and new business" were used frequently, other terms emerged because of the technical expertise of the respondents. Furthermore, there was an indication that they shared ideas that worked. These ideas, if incorporated into coursework and labeled, could save prospective and practicing superintendents years of trial and error in agenda setting and conducting successful meetings.

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